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ROUGH RIDING ON THE PLAINS

50 Years Ago. A Trooper's Story.

By ROBERT MORRIS PECK.

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These Cheyennes are excellent horsemen, and exhibited some feats of horsemanship today that would seem almost incredible, such as slipping down on the horse's side, and showing arrows from under the animal's neck, while on the run; picking up things off the ground while the horse was running; picking up their wounded comrades and carrying them off.

One Indian was seen running his horse at the top of his speed, while one of his (the Indian's) legs was broken and flopping about as he ran, during the fight. One of the things I witnessed myself exceeds anything that I ever saw or heard of, and I am afraid, hardly to be believed.

Capt. Beall, of "A" Co., and a German of my company, (E), named Mumky, were present and witnessed the same.

The three of us were chasing the Indian, and seemed to be gaining on him, all putting their horses down to their best speed—when the Indian looked back and saw that we were overtaking him. He then began to lighten himself and horse; throwing away his bow and arrows. He then sprang out of the saddle without checking the speed—on to the horse's back just behind the saddle, and reaching down with his knife cut the girth. Then took the saddle and bow and arrows and threw them away, sprang back into his place where the saddle had been. Then changing his long lance—which he had held all this time in his right hand—into his left hand he gave it a whirl about his head and a few yells, and the pony began leaping so fast that we saw it was no use to follow him further. I never could understand why the Indian should throw away his bow and arrows, his most effective weapons, and retain the lance.

Capt. Beall reined up his horse and said:

"Men, that fellow deserves his life and liberty. Let him go."

So we gave up the chase and as no others were near, we retraced our steps, stopping to pick up the Indian's bow and arrows, and some other "fixins" that he had thrown away.

[Capt. Wm. N. R. Beall; resigned August, 1891; because of injuries sustained at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., March 20, 1883; died July 20, 1883; Ed.]

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER.

Private Rollin M. Taylor, of my company, (E), had a desperate hand-to-hand fight with a big Cheyenne warrior today, the particulars of which, as given by Taylor himself, are substantially as follows:

"As the Indians closely pressed by, our men rushed pell-mell across the river, many horses mired down in the quicksands and a number of our men were killed. The Indians abandoned their horses to their fate, and floundered through to the other bank, coming out afoot. Taylor's horse was one that stuck, but Taylor stayed with him, and after some delay managed to extricate him, and safely made the other bank, but minus his rifle, which he had lost in the river. When he reached the bank, however, he found himself alone, his comrades having gone ahead, following and fighting the retreating Cheyennes. On looking about him, he espied a lone warrior, afoot, making his way across a trot, who had probably lost his horse in the river.

Not having time to return his saber, Taylor let it drop—hanging by the saber knot to his wrist. The Indian then started galloping after the Indian. He had not gone far until his horse tramped in a prairie-dog hole and fell, pitching Taylor over his head, his revolver flying some distance out of his hand. The Indian saw the accident and turned and started back toward his fallen foe.

Taylor quickly picked himself up, but could not find his revolver, and his horse was rendered useless by a broken leg. His saber hanging to his wrist was all the weapon he had left, and taking that in his hand he started to meet the enemy, the Indian meantime shooting arrows at him as he advanced, one going through his sleeve, another passing through his jacket, and the third and last arrow struck Taylor in the top of his forehead, splitting the skin a little, parting his hair in the middle, and glanced out of the top of his hat.

Finding a carbine lying on the ground that had been dropped or thrown away by some of our men, Taylor quickly grabbed it up, and with it he easily clubbed it and threw it at his enemy, who was now only a few yards from him.

The Indian dodged the carbine, then picked it up and threw it back at Taylor, but missed him. Seeing that the Cheyenne was out of arrows, Taylor rushed at him with his saber, thinking to easily finish him, but found the powerful savage almost a match for him with no weapon on his bow and butcher-knife. He would ward off Taylor's blows with his bow, now and then making a lunge at the little soldier with his knife.

In this manner they fought for some minutes (Taylor says he thought it hours) the Indian's bow being nearly chipped to pieces parrying his adversary's saber cuts. Once the saber glanced down the Indian's arm, taking out a huge slice, from which he bled profusely, but still kept up the fight. Once he changed his knife quickly to his left hand, and grabbed the warrior's blade with his right, only to get his hand badly cut in trying to twist the saber out of Taylor's hand.

By this time Taylor, who was a small man, was nearly played out, and began to think that his chances were doubtful. Both men drew back a pace or two for a breathing spell, when Taylor thought he noticed the Indian stagger a little, as if from weakness; and taking his saber in both hands, rushed at the Cheyenne furiously, aiming a heavy blow at his head. The red skin saw that he could not parry such a cut with his splintered and hacked bow, and so sprang backward to get out of the saber's reach, but in doing so tripped himself in some way and fell sprawling on his back.

Quick as a cat, Taylor sprang upon his fallen foe, thrusting his saber through him, and into the ground, then sat down on him, completely exhausted. The dying Indian raised his head a little and made an inquiring sign to know if Taylor was going to take his scalp. Taylor assured him that he would not scalp him, as if a smile of satisfaction passed over his face, as he dropped his head back and died.

While still sitting on the dead Indian, pausing, the first one to reach him was one of our Pawnee scouts, who came riding up, drew his knife and made a sign to Taylor that he wanted to take the Cheyenne's scalp. Taylor told him "no," but the Pawnee insisted—he must have it.

The little soldier withdrew his saber from the Cheyenne's body, and gave the Pawnee to understand that if he didn't take himself away he would use it on him.

Quite a crowd had gathered about the little hero and his dead enemy by this time—several soldiers and officers and several Pawnees; and when it was explained to them through an interpreter that he had promised the dead Cheyenne that he should not be scalped, they reluctantly agreed to forego the pleasure of "lifting his hair."

AFRAID OF HIS MAJOR.

Taylor had long ago (when we were recruits together at Jefferson Barracks) confided to me that he was a deserter from Co. A, 2d Art., that he deserted from the company in California two or three years previous to this time. He said that his

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Our 20-day rations were out this evening; we ate the last of them for supper. We will be restricted to a diet of beef alone, now, and for fear of fighting out, we are cut down to three-fourths of a pound per day to each man.

A full ration of beef is one and one-fourth pounds per day per man. This is a plenty when we are getting full rations of other things, such as coffee, sugar, bread, beans, rice, salt, etc., but to be confined to poor beef alone, and but little over half rations of that, is pretty slim fare for hungry men on the march.

The prospect is not flattering. The camp seems gloomy. True, we have whipped the Cheyennes, but here we are, away out in the wilderness, hundreds of miles from a human habitation, with all

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Inf. 1847-'48; mustered out; restored to Army as First Lieutenant U. S. Cav., in 1853; discharged May 4, 1859; Captain Alabama Cav., C. S. A., 1861-'65.—Ed.]

While this was going on the rest of us were busy spading up sod and laying it up in a wall, to protect the infantry and wounded from an attack should a party of the Cheyennes return. This wall was laid up about five or six feet high, inclosing a square space large enough to contain the little guard and their animals.

It is probable that in after years the first settlers of northwest Kansas found the remains of this little fort, and wondered by what purpose it was built. It was all Kansas Territory then, clear to the mountains—Counties not laid out—and I don't know just where to locate it. But it was on the south bank of the Solomon River, well toward the head of that stream. There is no timber on the Solomon here except a few scattering cottonwood and elm trees.

AN ABANDONED CHEYENNE CAMP.

About noon we bid good-by to the infantry company detailed to remain and protect the wounded, and started on our way on the Cheyenne trail. At a distance of about 15 miles from the Solomon we came in sight of the Cheyenne village, which was built on a high point of land, but no herds of ponies or other signs of life to indicate the presence of the enemy, and soon our scouts, the Delawares—the Pawnees having been left with Capt. Foot's company of infantry—well toward the news that the village was abandoned by the Cheyennes, evidently the previous evening, and in such haste that they had left all their lodges and articles of Indian life and their property.

We soon reached the village, which was well located in a horseshoe bend of a small creek. The deserted warriors, coming back after the night, must have created a panic; for they had left nearly everything—seemingly, from appearances, to have gathered their ponies and packed only such few things as they could grab in their hurry. A few old, broken-down ponies were left. Great quantities of dried buffalo meat, buffalo robes, buckskins, antelope skins, wolf and fox skins, blankets, moccasins, leggings, all sorts of Indian "fixins" in great profusion were found in the lodges.

They seemed in the first place to have been in the habit of sleeping in the warriors had rigged themselves up in their best war toggery, and marched out 15 miles to meet us on the Solomon, making no preparation for moving their village; when the Cheyennes, who were wounded, braved came running back to report the result of the fight—and probably their excitement caused them to greatly exaggerate our campfires tonight thinking of recognition, he had come to think that the Cheyennes had been so badly whipped that they would not return.

It is customary when in camp for a warrior to set up a small campfire in front of his lodge, on which he hangs the scalps that he has taken. These are prized very highly, and the case must be extremely desperate when a warrior leaves these trophies. I found several of these little poles, strung with scalps, still standing in front of the lodges. These, I concluded, were the property of the warriors who had been killed in the fight of yesterday, and their families or relations had been so frightened as to forget them. I pulled down one pole, bearing six or eight scalps, and as they were so small, as relics, threw the scalps away. These were attached to light willow hoops, the flesh side dressed and some of them ornamented on the flesh side with beads, paint or porcupine quills.

After looking over the village, and helping ourselves to such things as we could make use of, we tore down their lodges and piled them and all other property in a heap, and left them to them. We appropriated the dried buffalo meat, and packed a lot of it on our mules, for future use, but could find nothing else in the line of grub.

After destroying their village we camped for the night on the bank of the adjacent creek.

FOLLOWING THE CHEYENNE TRAIL.

In the morning we resumed our march, following the trail of the Cheyennes, which is a very plain one, going southward.

Through a dry, barren and desolate country they are leading us where we can find no game for our subsistence, very little grass for our animals, and watering places few and far between.

But on we go, day after day, making as long marches as our men and animals can endure, our subsistence being cut down to four-fourths of a pound of very poor beef per day to each man—not a bit of anything else but beef and water, both of poor quality and of small quantity. Not even a grain of salt to season our beef and water. We soon grew very much parched. We sometimes sprinkle in a little gunpowder for seasoning, but it makes a very poor substitute for salt.

We draw our rations of beef each afternoon, after coming into camp, a Texas steer being killed each day, for the subsistence of the command—the one usually selected being the one about to give out on the march, and if one gives out during the day's march he is butchered on the trail and the meat packed on our mules till we arrive in camp. The entrails of the beef and every other part can be utilized as food are greedily devoured by the starving soldiers.

Our officers fare about like the men. They possibly get a little more beef to the men than is allowed each soldier, but they have nothing but beef and water. Even the old Colonel comes down to the common bill of fare. The men become so ravenous that it is found necessary to post two guards over the beef, while the butcher is cutting it up, to keep them from carrying the meat off, and when the entrails are thrown aside, a hungry crowd pounces onto them like a pack of famished wolves. Each company's allowance of beef is issued on a pole between two men and carried to the company's camp. There it is cut up and divided between the men, and usually eaten for supper—the amount being too small to make two meals.

This is nearly starvation. But for 23 days we lived thus, making from 25 to 30 miles per day, before we got to reach the full rations again. On rare occasions we kill a little game. For instance, one day some man of my regiment killed a wolf, and we had a grand feast of wolf meat. On another occasion a pole-cat was killed and we ate that. One day I found a couple of young buzzards in a nest at the foot of a tree near camp, and I and my chums had a mess of stewed buzzard. In this way the bill of fare was varied some, but not much.